

Remarks by Donald C. Winter  
Secretary of the Navy  
Whiteman Air Force Base Community Council  
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Ladies and gentlemen, I am very pleased to be here among so many strong supporters of our military, and among people who have a deep appreciation for those who serve.

Although you live far from our Nation's coasts, and although you might have a slight bias in favor of all things Air Force, Congressman Skelton assures me that there is no shortage of passionate supporters of our Navy and Marine Corps in this crowd.

When I accepted Congressman Skelton's invitation to come here, my staff decided to conduct some extensive research on the correct pronunciation of The Show Me State.

After several weeks of investigation, the research team concluded that for a person from Brooklyn, New York, whose accent reflects such origins, the question is irrelevant, as no one in this audience will expect me to pronounce it correctly anyway.

So, with your indulgence, I will merely state that it is great to be back in Missouri, and to be in our Nation's heartland, home of so many great Sailors and Marines who are out there everyday defending America.

When I think of Missouri, the first things that come to mind—aside from our awesome fleet of B-2 bombers, of course—are Harry Truman and Mark Twain.

Both Truman and Twain were colorful, one-of-a-kind-broke-the-mold characters, and both possessed a homespun wisdom that won the hearts of their fellow Americans.

My favorite Mark Twain witticism is actually something I've always tried to abide by.

Twain's advice is timeless:

"Always do right. This will gratify some people and astonish the rest."

I would add to that—especially in Washington!

I suspect that the Chairman is in full agreement with me here . . .

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All kidding aside, I do wish to thank you for the wonderful hospitality you have

shown me and my traveling team during my visit here.

Today I would like to talk to you about what your Navy and Marine Corps are doing, and put that into some historical perspective as well.

This year we happen to be celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Theodore Roosevelt's Great White Fleet.

Theodore Roosevelt is more famous today for his exploits leading the Rough Riders up San Juan Hill, for having his face on Mount Rushmore, and for being the youngest president in U.S. history, but a century ago he was also quite famous as a passionate, longtime advocate in support of building up the Navy, and as the man who conceived of the idea of sending 16 battleships—painted white—around the world.

TR was the mastermind of the Great White Fleet, and he personally presided over its launch from Norfolk, Virginia on December 16, 1907.

But there is quite an interesting history leading up to that moment, for it is probably not overstating the case to say that we never would have had 16 battleships 100 years ago had it not been for the efforts of Theodore Roosevelt.

If we go back in time to the post-Civil War period, the U.S. Navy had contracted in size such that by 1880, our U.S. Navy ranked 12<sup>th</sup> in size—smaller than Chile's Navy.

We had only 48 obsolete ships in commission, manned by fewer than 6,000 Sailors—the majority of whom were foreigners.

The Navy had fallen into such hard times that one Secretary of the Navy lamented that it had become “a subject of ridicule.”

The fleet was focused on coastal defense, and it cruised the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers, while almost never venturing into the high seas.

Enter Theodore Roosevelt.

There were other great champions of the Navy to be sure—Alfred Mahan, Steven Luce, William Chandler, William Sims, and others—but no one could quite match Theodore Roosevelt's extraordinary energy and indomitable will.

Roosevelt was already a noted naval historian when he read Mahan's classic work on seapower over a weekend in 1890, and he was profoundly influenced by Mahan's ideas.

One of Mahan's most important ideas argued against the doctrine of coastal

defense:

“Passive defenses belong to the army; everything that moves in the water [belongs] to the Navy, which has the prerogative of offensive defense.”

Offensive defense was another way of saying that we needed to build a modern navy, with world class battleships able to deploy far from our shores to protect our interests—in today’s parlance, “enabling the away game.”

President William McKinley appointed Theodore Roosevelt Assistant Secretary of the Navy in 1897, and Roosevelt served in that position during the greatest warship-building program to that point in U.S. history.

Later, as president, beginning in 1901, Roosevelt pushed Congress relentlessly to build up the fleet, culminating in the world tour of the Great White Fleet that began in November 1907 and came to a triumphant conclusion 14 months later after having traveled 43,000 miles, including 20 port calls on six continents.

The story of how a small, fledgling fleet with limited range expanded into a mighty Naval force of 16 battleships with global reach weighed heavily in my mind during my recent trip to the former Soviet republic of Georgia.

USS JOHN L. HALL—one of our Perry class frigates—was making a port call in Batumi, Georgia during my visit there, and the HALL was celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Great White Fleet.

Georgia’s position is similar to ours in earlier periods of our history in that its leaders have made a decision to build up its navy.

The Republic of Georgia—which has 2,000 combat troops on the ground in Iraq and which has been a steadfast ally of the United States in recent years—is a maritime nation blessed with a strategic position on the Black Sea between Europe and Asia that recalls its historic role as a major trading outpost along the ancient Silk Route.

Its importance today in transporting energy and other resources is as important as it was in transporting silk and spices from China to destinations across Europe centuries ago.

Georgia’s recent history—from its breaking free from Soviet tyranny to the Rose Revolution—is a reminder that the fate of nations cannot be predicted, and that leaders can push nations into new directions.

The great uncertainty over what the future holds is a driving force behind our own efforts to build up our Navy.

When I say build up our Navy, I do not mean only in terms of the number of ships, although that is an important part of it.

We are faced with a dual challenge—one short term and one long term.

We must prosecute today's war on terrorist enemies in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere—while at the same time prepare for future challenges by modernizing and expanding the fleet.

We must devote resources to the war we are fighting today.

Indeed, with troops in harm's way as we speak, it is our highest priority.

And yet, we cannot afford to neglect future readiness and capability—especially given the great uncertainties associated with future threats.

Because the Navy necessarily has long lead times in building our ships and aircraft we must invest now in shipbuilding and aviation.

To that end, we are investing in new platforms across the board—from new aircraft carriers, destroyers, guided missile cruisers, amphibious ships, and littoral combat ships, to new generation submarines and aircraft.

With no major powers capable of challenging us at sea currently in view, some question the need for substantial investment in shipbuilding.

But the future course of many countries, including that of China, is highly uncertain, and China's intentions, in particular, are unclear.

We do know that China's economy is growing by leaps and bounds, and that China is investing heavily in its Navy—particularly its submarine force.

Other nations—such as Russia and Iran—are also intent on expanding their Naval power.

I believe that George Washington and Ronald Reagan were right—peace through strength was their motto.

If we wish to deter aggressors, we must be strong, and we must invest in military strength—especially the Navy.

Nearly 106 years ago, President Theodore Roosevelt, in a message to Congress, stated his opinion that:

“A good Navy is not a provocation to war. It is the surest guaranty of peace.”

I quite agree.

It is my view that the surest guaranty of peace is to continue our current course of across the board modernization of the fleet, and to continue with our plan to increase the number of ships in the fleet from our current 279 to 313 ships by 2020.

This program of Naval transformation and expansion has, for the most part, enjoyed bi-partisan support in Congress, and it has put the Navy and Marine Corps on a path that will serve us well in future decades.

Our current Maritime Strategy calls for both hard power and soft power—but the soft power of diplomacy is of little value unless back up by hard power.

We are making greater use of all the elements of soft power—cooperative engagement, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations, and diplomacy—but we must do so while still recognizing the vital importance of warfighting capability.

All these changes are taking place at a time when the Nation is at war.

In support of ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Navy and Marines are making very important contributions, and they are contributing ways that are new, especially for the Navy.

Currently there are approximately 4,000 Marines in Afghanistan, and 25,000 Marines in Iraq.

Their superb performance and routine heroism is well-known, and follows in the Marine Corps’ long tradition of combat excellence without peer.

Less well-known are all the ways the Navy is contributing to this struggle against enemies who have embraced terrorist tactics of unimaginable cruelty.

There are currently approximately 15,000 Sailors on the ground in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere in the Central Command Area of Operations, and these “Sand Sailors” are serving in a wide range of jobs—from masters at arms guarding detainees to Seabees to Electronic Warfare specialists to Explosive Ordnance Disposal personnel to corpsmen to Riverine force Sailors.

And, words do not do justice to the work our SEAL’s are doing over there.

The terrorists fear them, and rightly so.

What the SEAL's do routinely is awe-inspiring, and they do it everyday, in stealth, and with incredible courage.

Americans do not often read about their heroics, but I can assure you that they are genuine heroes in this war.

Combat missions on the ground are not, however, the only theatre of operations in this war.

Our Sailors are also involved in numerous counter-terrorist operations at sea, particularly in the areas of maritime security in the Arabian Gulf, and intelligence and surveillance operations worldwide.

There are approximately 10,000 Sailors at sea in the Central Command theatre, and they are making important contributions to this war.

All Americans should be proud of what our Sailors and Marines are doing to protect America, and to defend our interests around the world.

It is a humbling experience to serve alongside them, and I salute them all.

They know that America is a great country, and that the blessings of liberty we enjoy are worth defending.

Thank you for all your support for those who serve, and may God continue to bless America.